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March Precipitation Over the Great Lakes
As a percentage of the long-term March average:

Great Lakes Basin	55%
Lake Erie (including Lake St. Clair)	56%
Lake Superior	66%
Lakes Michigan-Huron	32%
Lake Ontario	110%

Note: These figures are preliminary.
March Outflows From the Great Lakes

LEVEL news
Great Lakes - St. Lawrence River Water Levels

Volume 7, Number 4 **April 7, 1999**

Dry Weather Over Most of Great Lakes Basin

Lake Levels Well Below Those of Last Spring

Dry weather during March over most of the Great Lakes basin has restricted the rise in water levels that usually occurs during the month.

Most of March's precipitation fell in the first six days of the month, giving water levels a boost at that time. However, water levels declined over the remainder of the month on all of the lakes except Lake Ontario, due to the dry conditions and the slow snow melt that allowed much of the meltwater to evaporate or be absorbed into the ground.

During March, Lake Superior was over 20 centimetres below its level the previous March, and it was at its lowest level since 1926. At the beginning of April, it was 21 centimetres lower than average, and 14 centimetres below chart datum. While it is anticipated that the lake's level will rise over the spring and summer months, it will likely remain well below average. The low level will significantly impact the size of loads that commercial ships can carry this spring.

Lake Huron's level was about 50 centimetres below that of last March, and it was the lowest March level since 1990. At the beginning of April, it was 16 centimetres lower than average. If conditions stay dry, the lake's level this summer will be the lowest since 1966. If, however, precipitation is near average over the next few (continued on next page) months, then the lake's level will be slightly below that of 1990.

During March, both lakes St. Clair and Erie were almost 60 centimetres lower than last March. Despite this steep decline, at the beginning of April, Lake St. Clair was right at its average level, and Lake Erie was three centimetres above average. The levels of these lakes are likely to remain close to average into the summer months.

The largest decline from last year's level has occurred on Lake Ontario, which was 65 centimetres lower than March 1998. At the beginning of April, the lake's level was 21 centimetres lower than average, but it has risen by 30 centimetres since the beginning of the year. It is very likely that the lake's level will remain slightly below average over the spring and early summer.

Montreal Harbour is also experiencing low water levels. During March, it was about 80 centimetres below average, and only 20 centimetres above the record low for March.

As a percentage of the long-term March average:

Lake Superior	82%
Lake Erie	94%
Lake Huron	103%
Lake Ontario	103%

Note: These figures are preliminary.

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Summary information for "LEVEL*news*"

The rapid decline in water levels over the past year will create some difficulties for recreational boating and commercial navigation, as well as for some cottages and homes that draw their water from the Great Lakes and connecting rivers. On the positive side, the risk of flood and storm damage has been greatly reduced with the decline in levels.

IJC Public Hearings Held

In March the IJC held a series of eight public hearings around the Great Lakes - St. Lawrence basin as part of their investigation on the consumption, diversion and removal of waters, including removals in bulk for export. Attendance ranged from 50 to 100 at the hearings held in four Canadian and four U.S. cities.

At all eight meetings, the opinions expressed by participants were overwhelmingly opposed to the diversion or export of water from the Great Lakes system. Concerns about the impacts such actions would have on the environment and about the setting of a precedence for larger exports in the future were frequently expressed.

A preliminary report on the study is scheduled for delivery to the Canadian and U.S. governments this August, and the final report is due in February 2000. Further information on the study and a forum for expressing views is available at: http://www.ijc.org/boards/cde/cdefront.html.

Boaters Beware

While lower water levels this year is good news for shore property owners who have suffered flood and storm damage in the past, it is not so favourable for recreational boaters. With lake levels anticipated to be 10 cm to 40 cm lower than last summer, recreational boaters could experience problems.

Most problems relate to insufficient draft for boats. Some marinas may experience problems accommodating larger boats, and may need to do some dredging. Access to marinas located up rivers from the lakeshore may be more difficult due to less depth in river mouths. Private docks may need to be extended or relocated in some cases. The lower levels could also pose problems for boat access to islands.

One of the greatest risks this summer is that rocks, shoals and other obstructions that were covered with sufficient water for safe passage last summer may now catch keels and propellers.

On the positive side, there will be additional clearance this summer under overhead obstructions such as bridges.

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URL: http://www.on.ec.gc.ca/water/level-news/lvn99apr.html